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E.O. 12958 N/A
TAGS: MARR, MASS, PGOV, EAID, BN
SUBJECT: HSV 2 Swift's Successful Visit to Cotonou

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The High Speed Vessel (HSV) 2 Swift visited Benin April 19 - 21, 2008. Cotonou was the last port the Swift visited as part of its deployment in support of the Africa Partnership Station (APS). The crew of the HSV Swift conducted a Maritime Safety and Security Information System (MSSIS) demonstration for Beninese naval officers, painted the headquarters of Cotonou's medical emergency services headquarters, and made a substantial donation of food and children's supplies to local NGOs. The visit was well received by the Government of Benin (GOB). End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Swift's visit provided an ideal platform to engage with Benin's Armed Forces (FAB). The HSV 2 Swift conducted a demonstration on the MSSIS for 42 Beninese officials from the navy and police force. This demonstration was well-received as it followed the installation of Automatic Identification System (AIS) and MSSIS equipment at the Beninese naval headquarters by the U.S. Navy the week before. In addition to this training opportunity, the Ambassador accompanied the Swift's Captain to meetings with Brigadier General Soumanou Oke, Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Beninese Armed Forces, and Commander Fernand Ahoyo, Benin's Chief of Naval Operations, to discuss U.S. assistance to maritime security and peacekeeping programs in Benin.

¶3. (U) The Swift's Captain commended the Beninese naval escort into the port of Cotonou as the most professional escort provided during his deployment. Likewise, he also commended the U.S. Mission for the best Mission support the Swift experienced during its deployment.

4. (U) The crew of the Swift received widespread press coverage for its community relations activities which included the re-painting of the headquarters' building of Cotonou's medical emergency services. The Swift also made a donation of 22 pallets of food and two pallets of toys to three local NGOs. The crew of the Swift generously donated a large quantity of used clothing to a local orphanage.

5. (SBU) Comment: The GOB and FAB's well-organized reception of the HSV 2 Swift and willingness to engage with the ship's crew and commanders is indicative of the GOB's will to improve its capacity in maritime security and safety. The Swift's Captain recognized the professionalism of the Beninese navy as it escorted the Swift into port. The Beninese navy, while highly professional, is currently limited by a lack of the necessary equipment to control its maritime space. The proposed 1206 funding for two Defender class vessels would be an ideal way to provide that capacity. End Comment.

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